

GREEN SEAL

Introduction

Green Seal is an independent, non-profit organization involved in environmental standard setting, product labeling, and public education in the United States. Established in 1989, Green Seal issues a third party, seal-of-approval to consumer products that “cause less harm to the environment than other similar products” (Green Seal, 1997). The Green Seal is available to both US and foreign companies. In addition, Green Seal also encourages companies and other large buyers to become members of Green Seal’s “Environmental Partners Program” to develop environmentally sound procurement policies, and to pledge to buy environmentally preferable products.

As of August 1997, product standards or criteria had been developed for 88 product categories. Fifteen of these are currently undergoing final revisions after the public comment period that is part of Green Seal’s standards/criteria finalization process. To date, approximately 300 products have been awarded the Green Seal. As of August 1997, Green Seal has certified products from several foreign manufacturers including three Canadian companies (producing newsprint paper, sanitary equipment, and engine oil), one Japanese company (producing a heat pump,) and one Korean company (producing a bleach product).

Recent Developments

In 1993 Green Seal started distinguishing between two types of award criteria. These award criteria are known as “product standards” or “product criteria,” depending upon the product category. Product standards are award criteria for products that require more in-depth environmental impact or life cycle analysis. Standards are established for products that Green Seal considered to have greater environmental impacts and are, therefore, tested and assessed more comprehensively. In contrast, product criteria were established as a response to market interest (i.e., for product categories that manufacturers were interested in getting eco-certified). Product criteria are developed as a way to quickly certify product categories that are less complex or that are experiencing technological changes. Over time, however, the distinction between product standards and product criteria has become less significant for Green Seal.

Program Summary

Green Seal standards and criteria are developed on a category-by-category basis. Anyone, including industry, public interest groups, and the general public, may submit proposals for new product categories. Green Seal, however, makes the final decision as to which categories are chosen. Product categories are assessed based on a life cycle analysis. Once product categories are chosen, product standards and criteria are developed. Draft standards and criteria are sent for comment to relevant parties, such as manufacturers, trade associations, environmental and

consumer groups, and government officials, as well as to any member of the public who requests them. The comment period lasts for about 45 to 60 days.

Once the public comment period is completed, staff of the Green Seal Board of Directors finalizes the product standards and criteria and forwards them to the Environmental Standards Committee. The Environmental Standards Committee acts on behalf of Green Seal's Board of Directors in approving the final standards. Product criteria do not need the Board's approval and are sent directly for publication. Product standards and criteria are usually revised every three years to keep up with technological advances in product categories and to encourage continual environmental improvement.

Once the standards and criteria are published, manufacturers are encouraged to apply for the Green Seal. As part of the certifications process, manufacturers must demonstrate that they are in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local environmental regulations. Manufacturers pay a product evaluation fee and a monitoring fee, which is based on a fixed price plus the additional estimated cost of laboratory tests and travel to the manufacturers' facilities. If the product meets Green Seal's standards/criteria, the manufacturer is given a contract to use the Green Seal label on its product(s), packaging, and in advertising, for as long as the product stays in compliance with the standards. Green Seal re-evaluates its product standards every three years.

Program Methodology

Green Seal's acceptance of a product category for its label is based on a life-cycle assessment of several products on the market. Green Seal makes assessments based on the environmental impacts during various stages of the products' life cycle. These include: raw material extraction, manufacturing, transportation and distribution, product use, and disposal. Additionally, products are assessed on their potential for reuse, their maintenance needs, potential for recycling, ingredients, and environmental performance during the production process. Green Seal's goals are to set standards and criteria that reduce one or more of the following: toxic chemical pollution, energy consumption, impacts on water resources, impacts on wildlife, natural resource consumption, impacts on the atmosphere, and global warming. Products within a category must also comply with minimum performance standards, i.e., they must perform at least as well as other products in their category which are considered less environmentally preferable.

In setting product standards, Green Seal collects information about the product category from previous literature and studies done on the product category, as well as from its own independent testing and studies. Additionally, Green Seal collects data from manufacturers and previous life-cycle assessments conducted by other ecolabeling programs. For example, Green Seal exchanged information with Canada's TerraChoice program and adopted several of its product standards.

Green Seal's standard-setting procedure is a transparent one. The public is given the opportunity to provide comments on the draft standards. The commentators' suggestions are often based on the

feasibility of meeting the proposed environmental standards, given the available technologies for the category. Once standards are finalized by the Environmental Standards Committee, commentators may appeal the standards if they feel that their comments were not addressed adequately. This is done through a body known as the Environmental Standards Council, made up of technical experts and academic scientists. Once appeals are taken into consideration, Green Seal publishes the final standards along with a document that lists all significant comments and Green Seal's responses.

Other Information

In addition to the labeling program, Green Seal has also established the "Environmental Partners Program." There are two aspects to the program. Environmental Partners (businesses, government agencies, and other organizations,) may join the program by agreeing to the Environmental Partners Pledge, thereby committing to buying environmentally preferable products and services as part of their procurement policies. Additionally, pledged Partners have to establish a recycling program in their offices. Alternatively, business, organizations, and government agencies may opt to subscribe to the program and simply receive information materials from Green Seal about environmentally preferable products. Green Seal provides all its Partners with monthly *Choose Green Reports*, which recommend specific environmentally preferable brands of products, and lists places these products can be purchased. As of August 1997, there are 461 organizations taking part in the program; 163 of these organizations have made the Environmental Partners Pledge. Partner organizations include federal, state, and local government agencies, private companies, and universities and colleges.

In addition to the *Choose Green Reports*, Green Seal has published the *Office Green Buying Guide* and *Greening Your Property*. The *Office Green Buying Guide* provides guidelines for businesses to set up environmentally preferable purchasing policies. Specifically, the *Office Green Buying Guide* provides information on types of products offices can consider buying. For example, the *Guide* encourages businesses to reassess the type of paper products they buy (e.g., buying papers made with recycled materials and fibers other than wood-pulp), or it may encourage purchasing energy-efficiency office equipment (e.g., Energy Star-labeled photocopiers, computers, and fax machines). In *Greening Your Property*, Green Seal provides similar guidance, specifically for the lodging (hotels and motels) industry, on developing their environmentally preferable purchasing policies and ways to engage in the notion of eco-tourism. The guide aims to educate the industry on ways to cost-effectively better their hotels' and motels' environments. In addition to *Greening Your Property*, Green Seal regularly contributes to the lodging industry's monthly magazine, *Lodging*, with articles on specific brands and product names.

Both the *Office Green Buying Guide* and *Greening Your Property* provide information on environmental considerations to keep in mind when purchasing products. Green Seal encourages businesses to consider the following characteristics of the products before making purchases: the products' life-cycle costs (e.g., cost of purchase, use, and disposal,) instead of simply the up-front

costs; durability; performance; energy and natural resources use; recyclability and recycled content; toxicity; biodegradability; and packaging. Additionally, guidance to businesses on ways to advertise to their employees, suppliers, and customers about their new environmental policies are provided.

Green Seal is also actively involved in coordination with other labeling programs. Green Seal and the Canadian TerraChoice program were the first two ecolabeling programs that urged for the establishment of the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN). In fact, Green Seal chaired GEN during the first three years GEN was established. Green Seal has encouraged information exchange and harmonizing with other programs through GEN. Additionally, Green Seal participates in International Organization for Standardization (ISO) activities.

References

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Product Categories (number of awarded products in parentheses)

Final Product Standards

- Electric chillers (100 tons to 2,000 tons rated capacity)
- Clothes dryers
- Clothes washers
- Combination ranges
- Electric or gas cooktops
- Dishwashers
- Freezers (30 CF or less)
- Ovens
- Refrigerators (39 CF or less)
- Combination refrigerator-freezers (39 CF or less)
- Engine oil
- Reusable utility bags
- General purpose cleaners
- Compact fluorescent lamps
- E26 medium screw ballast adaptors
- E26 medium screw fluorescent self-ballasted lamps
- E26 medium screw lamp holder conversion kits
- Interior and exterior architectural coatings
- Bathroom tissue
- Blanks
- Bond paper
- Bristol paper
- Business forms
- Coated printing paper
- Copy paper
- Cover paper
- Drawing paper
- Facial tissue
- Gift wrapping paper
- Labels
- Ledger paper
- Lightweight printing paper
- Manifold and onion skin paper
- Newsprint and printed products manufactured from newsprint
- Other printing and writing paper
- Paper napkins

Paper towels
Tablet paper
Uncoated groundwood-free paper
Faucet aerators
Kitchen faucet
Lavatory faucet
Toilets
Electric storage heaters (20 to 120 gallons and 12 kW input)
Heat-pump heaters (max current rating of 24 amp. at 250 volts)
Gas storage heaters (20 to 100 gallons and 75,000 Btu/hr max input)
Oil-fired storage heaters (50 gallons or less and 105,000 Btu/hr max input)
Glazed exterior doors
Skylights
Storm doors
Windows
Retrofittable window films

Final Product Criteria

Residential central air-conditioning systems (cooling capacity of 65,000 Btu/hr or less)
Split ductless air-source heat pumps (cooling capacity of 65,000 Btu/hr or less)
Alternative-fueled vehicles (CNG or electric)
Fleet vehicle maintenance
Powdered laundry bleach
Discrete informational labels for plastic parts
Passive infrared sensors
Ultrasonic sensors
Dual technology sensors
Audio and/or microwave sensors
Anti-corrosive paints
Paper products used in the preparation of food (coffee filters, baking paper and parchment)
Office copiers
Showerheads
Garden hoses
Sprinkler hoses

Product Categories under revision after the public comment period (all of these will be product standards once finalized)

Adhesives
Gap sealants
Weather proofing sealants
Tub and tile sealants

Through the wall air-conditioning units
Window air-conditioning units
Ceiling and close to ceiling luminaries
Exterior luminaries with photocell
Outdoor brackets and lanterns
Porch lights
Recessed downlights and wallwashers
Security lights
Task lights
Wall sconces and brackets
Toner cartridges for printing and reproduction equipment

